U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Underground fuel release at Midway Atoll:

02/18/2003 Update

Since last week, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been working to locate, halt, and clean up an underground spill of JP-5 fuel at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge. In an attempt to keep you informed on our progress, we will be posting updates with photographs as time permits. This first update is considerably longer than future ones will be and covers our activities since the time the leak was discovered.

02/05: After determining that the fuel tank was not the source of the leak, FWS and GeoEngineers, Inc., began testing the multitude of pipelines leading from the tank to various sites on Sand Island. A small amount of fuel bubbling to the surface near the fill stand across the road from the fuel tank provided the first visual evidence of the leak.

02/06: After confirming two contracted employees were certified to work in the hazardous materials site, an old concrete vault was excavated about 2' below the surface.

Inside the vault was an 8" fuel line and a 2" steel nipple, capped with an aluminum camlock fitting. The camlock fitting was badly corroded. Opening the valve allowed fuel to flow from the nipple.

A steel cap was secured to the nipple and additional testing showed no further leakage.

02/07-02/18: A U.S. Coast Guard flight on February 7 brought more resources to the project. Employees from Pacific Environmental Corporation and GeoEngineers and the Fish and Wildlife Service's Regional Environmental Compliance Specialist arrived on Midway to begin extracting fuel from the water table about 8' below the ground surface. Two extraction pits were dug. A mixture of water, JP-5 fuel, and heavy black oil began flowing into one pit, the other pit contains mostly JP-5 fuel.

A skimmer is being used in the extraction pit where the JP-5 and black oil is located. JP-5 fuel from the other extraction pit is being pumped out. The fuel mixture is pumped into an empty Mogas truck, where sand is allowed to settle to the bottom. The fuel mixture is then being transferred into fuel farm tank #30, where it will be stored until it can be transported to a recycling facility in Honolulu. Some of the JP-5 fuel may be recoverable for use in the generators on Midway. As of February 18, approximately 20,000 gallons of the fuel had been recovered.

2/14: Test holes surrounding the fuel farm area indicate the plume is localized and not spreading. Monitoring of the marine environment continues, but no fuel has been found in the lagoon.

A lengthy list of equipment and materials needed to address the current and future remediation effort has been generated. These items are being procured and should be delivered to Midway next week. New sumps and recovery wells will be installed, and a more sophisticated automated system will be activated to complete cleanup activities.

Through a detailed review of fuel farm records, GeoEngineers, Inc., has determined that approximately 100,000 gallons of JP-5 were released through the corroded fitting.

In the meantime, life goes on at Midway, with hundreds of thousands of young chicks growing quickly. Stay tuned for more updates later.